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SUBJECT: ONDCP DIRECTOR'S APRIL 5-6 VISIT TO THE HAGUE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Director for the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), John Walters visited The Hague on April 5-6, at the end of a three-nation tour that included stops in Afghanistan and Belgium. Walters met with Thomas Driessen, Director of the Dutch National Crime Squad, the Dutch Ministers of Health and Justice--who share responsibility for drug policy in The Netherlands--and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for Political Affairs Hugo Siblesz. Walters provided a readout of his trip to Afghanistan, noting that considerable progress had been made in poppy eradication. He also commended the Dutch for the substantial steps they have taken to curb their Ecstasy trade. The Director promised to send an ONDCP staffer to The Hague soon to further follow-up on the bilateral statement of cooperation that he and Health Minister Hoogervorst signed last July. Siblesz updated Walters on the current state of play in Dutch international anti-drug cooperation, particularly related to the Caribbean and Latin America. Walters welcomed the Dutch efforts and expressed his intent to continue to engage the Dutch on counter-drug initiatives, particularly in the area of research and drug treatment efforts. Walters was accompanied by Ambassador Arnall, ONDCP Special Assistant to the Director James O'Gara, ONDCP Assistant Deputy Director for the Office of Supply Reduction Patrick Ward, ONDCP Policy Analyst Charlotte Sisson, DEA Country Attache Jeffrey Boobar, and US Embassy Officer Lisa Brooks.

¶2. (SBU) ONDCP Director Walters' visit to The Hague began with a briefing from the Director of the National Crime Squad, Tom Driessen. Driessen noted that his organization had been operational for only two years, is under the control of the Justice Minister, and has responsibility for organized crime, including counter-drug, counterterrorism, and illegal weapon interdiction operations. He said that the establishment of the Crime Squad had significantly enhanced the ability of the Dutch police to cooperate effectively with international partners; previously investigations of serious crimes were decentralized in the 25 regional police forces. He stressed that international cooperation was vital. The Netherlands is a major transit point for narcotics entering the European market -- "the Miami of Western Europe" -- and consequently the Dutch police rely on relationships with partners, especially in the area of intelligence sharing, to combat criminal organizations that operate in several countries. Driessen conceded that insufficient progress had been made on efforts to track and interdict illicit money. He noted that Dutch privacy laws and limited resources make

it necessary for police and prosecutors to concentrate on stopping the sale, production, and distribution of drugs; following the flow of illicit finances is a lower priority; this is an area where international assistance is particularly valuable. He further noted that while countries such as the United States have a easier time stopping illicit finances because of more liberal banking laws, in the Netherlands it is easier to obtain permission to do wiretapping operations: each system has its advantages and disadvantages with regards to law enforcement tools at its disposal. (Comment: Driessen is extremely pro-US and was instrumental in convincing the GONL to allow DEA agents to co-locate with the National Crime Squad Cocaine Unit. End Comment.)

13. (SBU) Driessen noted that the Dutch public continues to distinguish between "soft" drugs (marijuana) and "hard" drugs (cocaine and heroin). They tolerate personal consumption of soft drugs because there are no definitive studies showing that marijuana has serious health consequences for casual users. Driessen noted that drug consumption in The Netherlands has stabilized, and the DEA Attache added that the average age of first-time drug users is going up in Holland. The Dutch have the lowest drug addiction rates in Europe. These factors make it difficult to convince the general public to view cannabis use as anything other than a social or public nuisance problem. Driessen added that any effort to close down all marijuana coffeehouses would likely be strongly resisted because they are widely viewed as a unique part of the Dutch character. He did note, however, that mayors in border cities and in Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam have been successful in permanently closing coffeehouses that have been found to sell cannabis to minors, sell more than the allotted amount to a single customer, or violate other laws governing the operation of coffeehouses.

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As a consequence, the total number of coffeehouses in The Netherlands has steadily declined. (Comment: It is likely that in a few years, only well-established, law-abiding coffeeshops will remain in business. End Comment.) Driessen added that the police are also paying more attention to combating organized crime groups involved in the production and trafficking of cannabis. He said there is now less of a tendency for officials to "close their eyes" to the "back door" problem of coffee houses being supplied from illegal indoor marijuana "plantations."

14. (SBU) Driessen noted that Dutch and other nationals have formed organized crime groups that control cocaine and heroin distribution in The Netherlands. For example, Colombian, Surinamese and Eastern European criminal organizations are active in the country, particularly in Amsterdam and other major cities. Driessen added that organized crime is not of the magnitude or scale that is found in the United States or other European countries. However, there are large profits to be made in cocaine and heroin smuggling and it remains a serious problem in The Netherlands with its open borders and large seaports. He further explained that the Dutch have had considerable success with the 100 percent check of passengers coming in from Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles, but containerized sea cargoes are a viable alternative for traffickers. (Comment: The Dutch currently only have two machines to x-ray some 8 million containers per year that come into the country; at best only 50,000 containers per year could be x-rayed. End Comment.) Driessen attributed recent success against Ecstasy production and export to a combination of good intelligence, a focus on how drug organizations work, and investigations of money and trade lines. He added that the Dutch could improve on their use and application of certain law enforcement methods. For example, Dutch police are currently prohibited from using civilian informants in undercover operations. On the other hand, they make extensive use of wiretaps.

15. (SBU) Director Walters met jointly with Justice Minister

Donner and Health Minister Hoogervorst. Walters provided a detailed report on his recent visit to Afghanistan. He noted that this was his third trip to the country in two years, and he saw marked improvement in Afghan willingness and ability to eradicate poppy cultivation. While the opium trade continues to represent a serious threat to the flagging government of President Karzai, poppy cultivation is down 50 percent overall and down 90 percent in Nangarhar province from 10 years ago. The ministers were accompanied by Arie IJzerzman, Director International Criminal Affairs and Drugs Policy Department, Ministry of Justice, (MoJ); Paul van Voorst, Head, Drug Policy Coordination Bureau, (MoJ); Gert Bogers, Senior Policy Advisor, (MoJ); Annemiek van Bolhuis, Director Nutrition, Health Protection and Prevention Department, Ministry of Health, (MoH); Senior Advisor Marcel de Kort, (MoH); and Albert Olthof, Chief, Bureau of International Police Cooperation, Ministry of Interior.

¶6. (SBU) In response to a query about how the Dutch could further assist the United States on drug-related issues, the Director noted that the United States was keen to increase cooperation on interdicting precursor chemicals used in the production of methamphetamines that transit through Dutch air- and seaports from India and China, destined for laboratories in Mexico and ultimately into the United States. Walters added that the United States still considers further reductions in the flow of South American cocaine and heroin into the United States as a top priority. Because of Dutch interests in the region, Director Walters suggested that the Dutch and the United States could further cooperate in this area.

¶7. (SBU) Both Hoogervorst and Donner noted that the Dutch are working cooperatively with countries around the world to reduce international drug trafficking. Health Minister Hoogervorst noted that he had recently returned from a four-day visit to Colombia and he was impressed by the Colombians commitment to drug eradication, adding that their "political survival" depended on it. He said that domestic consumption is a serious problem for the Colombians as well. Justice Minister Donner noted that he also had visited Colombia last August, and he was favorably impressed with the Colombians anti-drug efforts. He noted a disturbing trend in the smuggling of cocaine into Europe from Venezuelan ports,

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but was optimistic about an agreement -- currently awaiting ratification -- with the Venezuelans to boost counter-drug cooperation; the Surinamese have also requested closer cooperation, especially on controlling transshipment of drugs via air travel. Donner was proud that inspections at Schiphol Airport of aircraft from the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname had virtually eliminated those distribution routes. He further noted that The Netherlands, Spain and France are working cooperatively on efforts to interdict cocaine coming into Europe by sea, especially in the Costa del Sol region.

¶8. (SBU) Donner conceded that progress in other areas of anti-drug efforts has been mixed. For example he mentioned that tremendous progress had been made in the GONL 5-year program to halt the sale, production, and distribution of Ecstasy. However, he explained that public opinion and tight resources would make it difficult to mount a systematic attack against indoor marijuana plantations. He acknowledged that such plantations are particularly prevalent in the Rotterdam area; police are employing imagery and heat-seeking technologies to unearth illegal marijuana growers. Donner added that "drug tourism" from Belgium, France and elsewhere is a serious problem, especially in border towns such as Maastricht. He supports the mayor of Maastricht's initiative to limit coffeehouses in his city to Dutch residents in an effort to curb the drug tourism and concomitant crime.

¶9. (SBU) Director Walters reiterated the U.S. commitment to the statement he and Hoogervorst signed in July 2005 on

cooperative steps towards demand reduction and research into the causes and prevention of drug use. Walters noted that he would soon send an ONDCP staffer to meet with Dutch demand reduction experts to re-energize the initiative. He added that he hoped to have a new deputy onboard soon who is an expert in the field of demand reduction. Hoogervorst was pleased to hear that the statement would soon be getting greater attention on the U.S. side and welcomed the exchange among personnel. Walters indicated that he wanted to explore joint research opportunities, especially on the topic of long-term drug consumption. Hoogervorst provided the group with a readout on a study undertaken last fall on the effects of increasing levels of THC (psychoactive compound in marijuana) on humans. He noted that the bottom line of the study was obvious, "if you smoke marijuana that is twice as strong, you get twice as stoned." Health Ministry senior advisor, Marcel de Kort added that the study found that there were no additional side effects from increasing the levels of THC in the marijuana that the participants took, simply a greater intensity of symptoms such as increased blood pressure and drowsiness. Because the sample size only included 24 male subjects, it is impossible to draw meaningful conclusions from this one study.

¶10. (SBU) Walters also met with MFA Director General for Political Affairs Hugo Siblesz. Siblesz was accompanied by Marion Kappeyne van de Coppello, Director Western Hemisphere, (WHA); and senior advisors Walter Lok and Alexandra Valkenburg. The foreign ministry was keen to hear Walters' readout from his trip to Afghanistan. Walters noted that poppy production is not a "cash cow" for the average Afghan farmer and that strides were being made to bring infrastructure and utilities to rural areas to make other crops viable alternatives. He added that a military presence alone will not work and that the Karzai government was showing signs that it was expanding its control outside of the capital. In most areas, Afghan forces are leading counter-drug operations with the United States in back-up or support roles. Siblesz noted that Foreign Minister Bot will travel to Afghanistan and Pakistan in early May to assess the situation first hand.

¶11. (SBU) With regard to anti-drug efforts in other parts of the world, Siblesz commented that "efforts are up, but so are the problems." Kappeyne van de Coppello provided Walters with a readout of Dutch anti-drug initiatives in the Caribbean and South America. She noted that GONL is closely cooperating with the UK, France and Spain and wants the European Commission to step up its financial commitments to counter-drug efforts in the region. (Comment: The Dutch hosted a one-day conference on enhancing EU anti-drug cooperation in the Caribbean on February 9. End Comment.) In particular, the MFA is interested in exploring and

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eliminating the alliances between drug traffickers, organized crime groups and abusers of human rights. Kappeyne van de Coppello added however, that the Dutch respect the fact that countries such as Bolivia seek to preserve their traditional uses of coca, but La Paz is virtually powerless to do anything about overproduction. Director Walters noted that because Bolivian cocaine is of such a poor quality, little of it makes it to US shores and it is a bigger problem for Europe. Kappeyne van de Coppello also noted that the Dutch have an ongoing project with the Peruvians to help them identify suspect shipping containers that may contain contraband. She said that the Surinamese Minister of Justice was doing an excellent job at counternarcotics control with few resources. She concluded that the Netherlands Antilles, particularly Aruba, remain a primary focus for Dutch anti-drug efforts.

¶12. (SBU) Comment: Walters had wide-ranging and open discussions about a variety of drug-related issues with his Dutch counterparts. He complimented the Dutch on areas where substantial progress had been made, especially in the

decrease of Ecstasy coming into the United States from The Netherlands, and he made commitments to continue the positive bilateral efforts currently underway. For their part, the Dutch were pleased with the US-Dutch working relations on drug policy and law enforcement efforts currently underway.

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